

Idiomatic Language and Proverbs in Traditional Greek Tales

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Abstract

Stereotyped language of fairy tales in Greek traditional storytelling is examined in a selection of geographical regions of the Greek Islands and the close areas of other varieties of climatic and morphological areas of languages and dialects in Greek. The social issues of cultural components that may appear at language of tales is examined in a case of using storytelling as a methodological tool in teaching language at school. Storytelling and proverbs can adjust on different subjects of teaching at school such as History, Physics, Religion, Philosophy for Children. Values and attitudes are in school language textbooks involved through folk tales and other folk traditional stories. Our study presents some of these language examples of fairy tales and folktales to search the architecture of works that may be important to compare to other Countries and Language examples of tales.

Keywords: stereotyped language, folk tales, Greek language, teaching methodology, comparative literature.

1. Introduction

In our study we examine formulaic language of fairy tales and folk tales from Greece in five different geographic regions (Kyklades Islands (Aegean Sea), seven Islands – Eptanisa (Ionian Sea), Thrace (Northern-East Greece), Crete (South Island) and Hepirus (West Mainland)). The reason of our choice in the genre of fairy/folktales is the rapid contemporary interest of the Greek people to tales in an era of crisis in politics, economy and society and the superiority of tales in children's choices of reading at their primary education. Motif and rhyme within the grammar of traditional tales serve functional roles at the beginning and the end of the story in formulaic words and phrases. These involve functionality as intrinsic to fairy tales' language: Its entire architecture is arranged along cultural context lines. Comprehension depends on experience of the participants in this context. We can categorize tales in formulaic examples of: (1) the *field* which serves what's going on in the plot, (2) the *tenor*, which serves who is taking part in the plot through persuasive, polemic, explanatory or other language and (3) the *modes*: which provides a tale with the role played by language as didactic, rhetorical, explicatory or explanatory.

2. Formulaic language and Greek fairy/folk tales in educational settings

Our hypothesis at this level is that identification of possible formulaic sequences can be taught systematically, provide experience of cultural issues in comprehending texts of folktales to inexperienced audiences and also define fairy tales and folk tales as a genre which may be the missing point of assessment in language acquisition. Moreover, there are many second language learners in Greek schools for the last two decades. Multicultural educational methods appear to have a preference in fairy tales and theatre education for their importance in teaching language through artistic curriculum. Children work with tales a lot lately in Greek schools (zone of innovation in Primary education as a program of the Ministry of Greek Education and a new teaching subject of *Filanagnosia* as a term for “reading friendship” – friendship between children and the books). We also introduce a powerful component in the process of presentation of Fairy tales in Films, videogames and TV productions as a vehicle of applied formulaic language in context at international educational settings. Relationship between *formulaicity* and *creative* language is not a new idea. Linguists presented fragments of a universal formulaic puzzle in meaning making through language and tales through connotations and collocations (Meunier & Granger, Eds., 2008; Hoey, 2005).

Activities of recognizing clichés in fairy tales and myths, idiomatic phrases which work as morals, proverbs and very specific phrases of traditional tales’ identity can be involved in children’s games with language at school. The guessing game of what a formulaic phrase (usually of a high frequency) could mean in its holistic context is another possibility of children’s involvement in formulaic language acquisition. Children’s observation during their storytelling and reproduction of stories can provide teaching of Language with new conclusions about what storytelling and creative writing can bring in class (Ellis, 2008a; Wray, 2002). The development of a linguistic criterion about the right schematic-idiomatic phrase at the right time, in dialogues is a matter of working with tales, as we observed in production and comprehension of language at Greek primary schools for the last two years (2012-2014) in a Program of Multicultural Communication in co-operation with schools all over the country. A role of communicative competence in the development of story maps implies the awareness of a fantasy land that everything starts with the phrase “Once upon a time” or “Start of the tale, Good afternoon”. Functions of fairy tales as we observe are strongly connected to formulaic language in certain categories that we identified: Beginning and end of narration, time in the narration, etc. (Speelman & Kirsner, 2005; Ellis, 2008b, 2008c).

3. The case of the Greek tales

Since it is not safe to define formulaic language from the high-frequency of phrases’ appearance in speech we’ll try to introduce the examples of discourse for the genre of tales which showed clearly that Formulaic phrases are more popular in Kyklades fairy and folk tales (about 40% of the text). Fairy tales’ formulaic language is an important linguistic phenomenon in all Greek tales (20-24%) of the text. Information for second language learners of Greek are easy to be misunderstood when formulaic language is involved our study focused to the formulaic examples of the beginning and end of stories only, for reasons of accurate examination of the data. From our point of view, formulaic language of traditional fairy tales is a serious issue of meaning making and understanding language as mother tongue for native and nonnative speakers. It is not rare in Greek traditional tales to find cultural clichés as phrases from another era which have survived through traditional storytelling and writing. They often witness another cultural reality (for example, horses as transportation) and primitive agricultural life. Corpus research of formulaic language in different languages reveals the shared schemata of the human mind and language (Butler, 1997; Altenberg, 1998a, 1998b).

In a definition of our perception about the term, before we present the stereotyped schemata of formulaic language in Greek tales (an anthology of the most familiar 300 tales from different places), we need to explain that by formulaic language we mean a sequence of stereotyped words which may be continuous or discontinuous in a sentence which is prefabricated (Siyanova-Chanturia, Conklin & Schmitt, 2011; Conklin & Schmitt, 2008). These can be retrieved and stored as a whole from memory and are used in our everyday language. These patterns of ready-made expressions in semantics are amalgams of creative imaginative thinking and serve as frozen, stable and familiar expressions with specialized meaning in cultural context of language education.

Examples of stereotyped language and the role of prosody in
formulaic memorization of a story from Loucatos and Megas Collections
(two classical and recognized sources for the Greek ethnographic folk tales)

FIELD: Formulaic examples of language in Introduction/the beginning of Greek traditional tales. Rhyme and language prosody in a formulaic memorization of stories

1. Once upon a time. "Once uvon a time" (instead of "upon" as dialectic varieties: for a/vola, time/dime) In Greek: "Mia for a ki enan kairo";
2. Once upon a time, they say, ...'(s)he says...;
3. Once here was a.... (name descriptive adjective or noun) of hero (boy, king, girl, frog...);
4. Once upon a time when the animals could speak as we do, there was a (name of main character...;
5. Different versions of Beginning of a story in Epirus: *There was and there was not...* (Itan kai den itan);
6. "Fairy tales do not have salvation. They are a watermill which grinds nonstop. That's why after I tell the tale of the Red Rose Girl (Rodokokkini), I'll stop and I won't tell another tale";
7. Beginning of the fairy tale, good afternoon (e.g., in the "Two Gkoyntoyrades" Syros island);
8. Verse Schemata: *Red string tied to the reel spool, give the kick to turn, and let the tale start, and our good companion to say good evening to our good companion. Good evening to your lordship, good afternoon* (tale "The priest and the crazy women" - Place: Ithaca-Seven Islands-Ionian Sea. In Greek /rime Verse: Kokkini klosti demeni stin anemi tiligmeni / Dostis klotso na girisei / Paramythi na arxinisei kai thn kali mas sintrofia na tin kalssperisei - kalispera tsi afentias sas - kali sas espera.
9. *Mythi mythi mithiako - tale tale taley*
Siko pano na sto po - get up so as I tell you
Mythi mythi mithiako - tale tale taley
Katse kato na sto po - sit down so as I tell you
(Lefkada, Eptanisa: "The immortal woman" Beginning in rhyme).

FIELD: Formulaic examples of language in ending the tales

- And they lived good and we lived even better than them (and they lived happily ever after): "Kai zisane aftoi kala ki emeis kalitera". After the end of this formulaic expression there are other sentences such as "kai mou dosane koulouri kai mou to fage o skilos o kountouris" (we translate it in a free verse: *And they gave me a bagel and it took it and ate it from me the dog whose name was the Kountouregel*);
- And they passed their time life and chicken (zoi kai kota);
- good end, everything good: Telos kala, ola kala);
- End of the category of "The why stories": ...and since then these animals have their tail short and their back white;
- End of the fairy tale, good evening.... (Epirus, Kyklades);
- And that's how the story ends;
- "Money here and money there, but I didn't take a cent, because I wasn't there". Storyteller's third person's – narrator (title: "The short man and the dragon", from Paxi island);
- Lies and truths, that's how the tales do. (Title: "The miser priest", Kefalonia island);

- *And they lived fine and we lived bad and cold* (in Greek: “aftoi zisane kala kai emeis kala kai psyxra”, Title “The immortal girl”, Lefkada island);
 - *And they got married. And we were there and as we saw everything and listened and that’s the way we told you all these.* (Thrace);
 - *And I saw her when I passed from these places and she told me.* (Thrace);
 - *Neither we were there nor you believe it ...miden ego imoun ekei miden eseis na to pistepsete.* (Title: *ax ali mou*, Tinos island - Kyklades);
 - “...and I passed from there with a red underwear”, Rime - (Kai perasa ki ego apo ekei me ena kokkino vraki);
 - “lies and truth that’s the way that fairy tales go, too” (Psemata kai alithia, etsi einai ta paramythia. Kyklades).

FIELD: Formulaic phrases to express the change of situation in the story plot in relation with time perception

- *One day...* (to describe that something new happened...);
 - *The same time, at the moment...* (hour...);
 - *From day till night.* (all day long-duration);
 - *He comes closer... at last* (finally, after a long time). *Paei konta, kamia fora...*;
 - *Until you say “cumin”.* (it happened very fast: “The little ring”, Mykonos island, Kyklades);
 - *Road... he takes; road ...he leaves.* (to denote a long trip-duration);
 - *In a moment here and it appears* (Kai mia stigmí na sou kai faneronetai)- formulaic syntax.

FIELD:

TENOR/MODE in Rhetoric questions and explanatory formulaic phrases

In a rhetoric question to note the change of situation through an action, in terms of persuasive polemic, exhortatory function of language:

- *Do you know what I think?* (TURN from monologue / to dialogue: *Xereis ti skeftika...*);
 - *But what else could (the character), do...* (third person narrator: *ti allo na kanei?*);
 - *What else could the king say?* (instead of saying: the king could not do otherwise and he agreed). (Ti na pei o vasilias?);
 - *What to see.* (surprise) Ti na dei... (he saw something which when you hear it you’ll be surprised (rhetoric question). Also in the fairy tale “Mrs. sea” (Santorini Island).

Proverbs as morals in the tales-the didactic mode

Hatred was left to them. (In Greek: “Tous emeine i kakia”, The bull-tree, from Kithnos, Kyklades)

The apple will fall under the apple tree (a child looks like parents)

As the fate is written and what is written cannot get unwritten kind of proverbs.

In Thrace the end of tales with proverbs are common, they include what the main character should be (e.g., Mr. *Andreas*, *takes but doesn’t give*). These morals are inspired from Aesop, too.

To learn an art not to be hungry. (Kyklades)

When he heard it he flew with the north’s clouds (as the proverb says: Kyklades)

“Run, look for him/her and you, Nicholas do wait.” Treha yireve kai Nikolo karterei. (when somebody leaves and we will never find him, no matter how much we try. What is gone; is gone.)

Other formulaic phrases in fairy/folk tales –Frequently used in the Greek Language

I pass life and chicken and nothing is missing in my life (Zoi kai kota tin perno kai tipota den mou leivgetai...: from the tale “The two mice”, Sifnos island - Kyklades); when it is not in use but like takes its place in syntax at the beginning... which also means as: *San girisan piso*);

This, as you say, ... (pou lete...). So...as you would say, ...

But don’t you say to me? (Ma de mou les), It means “tell me something..”;

He told her the “kathecasta”. (From an ancient-archaic word that passed in the modern Greek language as a formulaic expression “Tis eipe ta kathekasta” (“The bronze castle”, Milos island);

- *To made someone of the salt....ton kano tou alatiou...* He argued with him and gave him a severe lesson;

- (to note “An abandoned area”) *where even a bird doesn’t fly*: “mide ‘ pouli petameno”;

- *For the “good” that I want for you*, “to kalo spou sou thelo”, (threatening INDUCEMENT: do something so as I don’t harm you);

- *You ll see what I’ll do to you...* (negative meaning) threatening INDUCEMENT);

- *this and this* (“ Afto kai afto” ... : he told everything to the listener) REPETITION; *and not to talk a lot*”, “Kai na min ta polilogoume”);

- *He looks here, he looks there* (he is seeking for something), but nowhere he can find it (In Greek: Koitazei edo, koitazei ekei, pouthena den to vriskei). REPETITION-rhythm.

Formulaic language for “love” in Greek traditional tales

- *my son is crazy with her*. (Einai trelos mazi tis, tale): tale named: “H katsikoula”, “The little goat”, Paros island.

- *he ll fall down to die. If he doesn’t marry her: Tha pesei na pethanei* (*He ll drop down dead*).

- *... And the bad sisters were left in the cold {water} of bath*. (In Greek: “meinane sta kria tou loytrou”. It means that ... *They just waited for love, in vain*.

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